



PRO RIDER

“ELITE” RIDER? HUH??

Words **Howard Mansell**

As part of the Ride Forever program, ACC has created the Gold course to help riders achieve the highest level of riding skills possible. The idea being that once someone has done a Gold course they would be an “Elite” rider. They would even get a certificate and a badge as part of that recognition.

But what is an Elite rider?

“ELITE” to me means “At the top of their field”, an Olympic gold medallist is getting close to the term.

This is (would be) a rider who has absolute, total control of their bike in every circumstance, a rider

- who is always in the perfect position on the road,
- who is always at the correct speed, achieves it with appropriate alacrity and maintains it,

- who always uses the correct throttle, or brake or body position input,
- who is always in the correct gear,
- who controls all hazards with perfect reactions, taking avoiding action successfully and not ending up in another bad place as a result,
- who is able to u-turn the bike on full lock at low speed,

- who knows what's going on all around them at all times and has 360 degrees of spatial awareness,
- who will never say, "it was 100% the driver's fault".

This is a person who can handle every difficult situation with no risk of crashing, or dropping their bike, and has perfect low speed and high-speed control. Loose surface, flooding, sand, tar bleed, ice, switchbacks, downhill corners, brake and escape, lane changing, all of these situations handled with perfection – every time. A person who is so in touch with their bike in every circumstance, that the machine is virtually an extension of their body, totally sensing and reacting to it as if feeling with their fingertips.

Tui moment!!!

I seriously doubt that there are more than a handful of truly "ELITE" motorcycle riders in the country. I know I'm not one of them; every time I go out on the bike I make mistakes, I always feel that I could be doing better. If asked, I'm pretty sure that most truly good riders would say the same, only the dangerously pompous and self-delusional ones would claim to be ELITE riders". The best we normal humans can do is to practice every chance we get, take training and coaching when we can, listen to our peers when they suggest better ways and strive to get better.

One of the things that I like to talk about is "Bugger Moments". Every bugger moment is one of those where you get a shock, or tighten up; you register that you could have had a really bad experience right then, if things had been slightly different.

A good example is when the sport bike goes past at speed and you didn't even know it was behind you, so it gives you a fright. In industrial environment terms, these are called 'near misses' and a near miss analysis should be done.

To do this, we need to know the process that should have happened and then we can judge the incident against that to figure out what went wrong.

In this situation it's quite simple – I wasn't checking my mirrors often enough.

Running wide on a corner is a bit more complex, but with an understanding of the cornering process we can do the same thing.

In this way we get better, ever so closer to "Elite". Every action that we do while riding can be defined as a process (or part of a process) and only when we understand the correct processes can we analyse Bugger moments. Only then can we get better, otherwise all we are doing is making the same mistakes over and over, because we can't learn from them.

Be open to learning, study information, listen to others and take professional training, always treat every suggestion with scepticism, make sure that you understand what's being suggested and judge it against other "knowns." Not all advice and certainly not every YouTube training video, will be correct.

Understand the physics involved, look at things practically, think about everything that is happening.

Don't be the classic cage driver, watching the world like a fish in a fish bowl: you are involved, be involved, stay alert, look after yourself.

This doesn't take away from the enjoyment of riding, in fact it's just the opposite, it enhances the feelings of riding because there is so much to focus on, so many ways that we realise that we can improve. We can experience a feeling of control that we never had before and so it sharpens the whole experience.

To be an "ELITE" rider should be the goal of all us riders. We will ultimately be safer and will enjoy our riding more and more as we get closer to our goal.

Just bear in mind that we are human and we very rarely achieve perfection in our lives, just getting close is pretty good though. ■■■

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